

Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church
Knoxville, Tennessee

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A Holy Week
Luke 19:28-40

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²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

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Today begins "Holy Week." What if you had to explain Holy Week to someone who knew nothing about the Christian faith? What makes this week so "holy?"

You'd need to start with the **politics**. The Roman Empire ruled. Rome had conquered Israel, Jesus' homeland, and held them under oppression.

What Rome would not tolerate was any hint of rebellion. Once a year, the majority of the Jewish population would go to the capital city, Jerusalem, for Passover, a festival celebrating their independence from their former Egyptian slave-masters. Rome would send in its legions of soldiers to fortify the city, making sure there would be no uprisings, no quest for independence.

When a 33 year old peasant carpenter, from the insignificant village of Nazareth, claims to be the *king of the Jews*, you can understand why that was a problem for Rome. There will be no "*king of the Jews*." There's only one king, one ruler of the empire, and that is Caesar. The Jews needed to get this Jesus guy under control. So this week begins with a political clash.

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But you also have to understand the **religious** issues. The Jews were expecting a Messiah, a religious leader, to come and restore Israel to power. Jesus didn't fit the bill. Back in the day, the most powerful king they had was King David. David was the king who established Israel as a mighty nation. You can hear it in the shouts they made as Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call *Palm Sunday*;

*'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in
the highest heaven! (Mark 1:9-10)*

Israel was expecting a different kind of Messiah.

- He would be a *great military leader* who would overthrow Rome and establish Israel as a world government.
- He would lead an *ethical revival*, renewing Israel to the law and the prophets.
- The Messiah would establish *world peace*.
- And most interestingly, he was not expected to be divine, but *human*. Though he would be an agent of God, the Messiah would not be the incarnation of God. God was too holy to be tainted by human flesh.

Rome would have no king, and the Jews would have a different kind of Messiah.

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So things heat up.

Jesus has been at this for 3 years. He and the disciples come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. The city was full of music, food, merchants selling their wares. Some estimate over 3 million Jews came to Jerusalem for Passover.

They stay each night this week in Bethany, two miles outside the gates of Jerusalem, in the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. He had raised Lazarus from the dead, so that tends to make you best friends!

Each day this week they will go into Jerusalem and then come back to Bethany to spend the night, until Thursday night – the night of his arrest.

Piecing together the accounts from all four gospels, we can get an idea of what occurred during that week.

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On **Sunday**, Jesus sent two disciples to get a donkey he had arranged to borrow in order to ride into Jerusalem. A colt was a sign of humility, not the horse of a king. The donkey makes a statement.

His followers laid down branches and clothing on the road, as they would for a king, to cover the dust and pave the way. The Jewish leaders asked him to order his disciples to stop, but Jesus said,

*"I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."
(Luke 19:40) Those same Jewish leaders said, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"
(John 12:19)*

Mark tells us that on Sunday, after Jesus entered Jerusalem ,

...he went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. (Mark 11:11)

That was Sunday evening.

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On **Monday**, he and the twelve go back into Jerusalem to the temple. It was likely on Monday when he turned over the tables of the moneychangers. (*Matthew 21:12*) Moneychangers would take secular Roman money and convert it to sacred temple money, so the Jews could pay their temple tax and buy their sacrificial animals for Passover. But the moneychangers made huge profits on the exchange. In anger, Jesus overturned their tables, made a whip and drove out the animals saying,

'My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of robbers.'

He walked right into the temple complex and turned over the system, right under the chief priest's nose. It would be like walking into the corporate office of Bank of America and burning money! This thing is coming to a head.

According to the Scriptures, he spent the rest of Monday teaching in the temple and then returned to Bethany to spend the night.

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On **Tuesday** they go back into Jerusalem. It is a day of confrontations, questions and traps. The Pharisees ask him about paying taxes to Caesar, (*Luke 20:20*). They tried to trap him with questions concerning what was the greatest commandment in all of the law. (*Matt. 22:34-40*).

It may have been on Tuesday when Jesus sat down in the temple courtyard to watch people bring their offerings. Luke tells us,

He saw rich people putting their money into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. (Luke 22:1-2)

He elevated her even above the giving of the rich. He's aggravating everybody.

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There are no records of the day on **Wednesday**.

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Thursday was the Day of Preparation for the Passover meal. Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to look for a room he had prearranged. We call it the "*upper room*." (Luke 22:7-13) They would go to the temple and purchase a lamb, cook it in a portable earthen oven, and prepare the other spices and elements of the Passover meal. Later in the day, Jesus and the other disciples would come to celebrate Passover before sundown.

When they got to the room, it would have been the custom for the host to provide a slave to wash the feet of the guests. On that night, Jesus took off his robe, strapped a towel around himself and took the role of the servant. He washed the feet of his disciples. What kind of king is this? And he said to them,

"If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)

Humility is a theme of this week.

At that Passover table, Jesus took the unleavened bread, and proclaimed it to be a new symbol of his body broken for all of us. It would be a new kind of exodus from a different kind of slavery. God is doing something new!

He would take one of the four cups of wine, likely the third cup, the cup of redemption, and proclaim it to be a symbol of his own blood for the forgiveness of sins and the redemption of all humanity.

They argued at the table as to who would be the greatest in the new kingdom. Little did they know that almost all of them would die as martyrs for the sake of this kingdom. It would be a different kind of greatness.

Judas left to betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities. Maybe he was trying to force Jesus' hand to establish this new kingdom for the Jews and overtake Rome. We don't know his motives.

The other disciples sang a hymn and left the city through the eastern gate, crossing into the Mount of Olives, into the Garden of Gethsemane.

It's now late into Thursday night, what we call *Maundy Thursday*, from the Latin word "*mandate*." Jesus gives a new mandate;

...that you love one another as I have loved you.

(John 15:12)

He leaves eight of his disciples at the entrance of the garden, tells them to keep watch, but they fall asleep. He takes Peter, James and John deeper into the garden.

They also fall asleep. The irony is that God is at work in the world while humanity is asleep. We can only hope that is still true.

It is here that we see the human struggle of Jesus. He struggles to do the will of God. He asked that *"this cup might be removed from me."* The cup of redemption? The answer is *"No."* God is going to allow humanity to exercise its freewill, even if it means the crucifixion of the Son of God.

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It's now pre-dawn on **Friday** morning. He is arrested by the Temple Police in the garden while the city is asleep. They take him to the home of the high priest, Caiaphas. There is a mock trial. The priest asked him if he is the Messiah and Jesus answers, *"I am."* (Mark 14:62a). Outside the rooster crows at dawn and a maid comes to work for the priest. She sees Peter with the others and says, *"You also were with Jesus!"* (Matthew 26:69), to which Peter replies,

"I do not know the man." (Matthew 26:70-74)

This week is not "holy" because of what the humans in the story portray.

The Jewish court could not execute anyone for their crimes. So they trump up three charges, all political in nature, so Rome will crucify him. These are the three;

1. *He's been perverting the nation.*
2. *He promoted the forbidding of paying of taxes to Caesar.*
3. *He claims himself to be a king.* (Luke 32:2)

Sometime after sunrise on Friday, they take him to Pilate's headquarters. Pilate struggles with this. He can't justify crucifixion, but he caves in and has Jesus stripped, beaten and sentenced to crucifixion.

They put a scarlet robe on him and a crown of thorns to mock him as a king. They put a reed in his hand and kneel down before him saying, *"Hail, king of the Jews."* They spit on him, flog him and lead him away to be crucified.

We call it *"Good Friday,"* not because of what we did but because of what God was doing.

He is nailed to a cross between two common thieves from 9:00 a.m. in the morning on Friday until 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Crucifixion is a slow form of suffocation.

The disciples have scattered in fear, except for John who was at the cross with Jesus' mother, Mary. Judas has committed suicide, in remorse for his betrayal. Joseph, Jesus' father, had likely already died, or he would have been there with Mary. It looked like everything Jesus had worked for over these past three years had crumbled and fallen.

He died, and they removed his body from the cross before sundown, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath. It's over...or is it?

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This **Thursday** evening, at 6:15pm, I don't know where you will be, or what you will be doing, but I would invite you to be here, to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, on Maundy Thursday. We are invited to that Table with Christ.

On **Friday**, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., stay aware of the hours of crucifixion. At noon, we will gather in the chapel to hear the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross and reflect on the significance of this event.

And then on **Sunday** morning at 7:00 a.m., we will gather for sunrise at Hunter Valley Farm to proclaim the message of resurrection and hope, followed by our regular worship services here at church.

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In order to explain this Holy Week to someone else, we have to understand the significance of it ourselves.

And so begins a *Holy Week*.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: **Amen**